
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SKUNK MANAGEMENT

Skunks occupy open lands, forest edges and riparian areas. They often enter the edges of urban and suburban environments as well as farmsteads boarding these kinds of habitats. They are often attracted to human residences by food (pet food & garbage) and attractive harborage (wood piles, junk piles, idle machinery and open foundations under structures). Skunks should not needlessly be destroyed because they are largely beneficial by eating mice and pest insects. However, their presence around human habitation should be discouraged.

The presence of skunks can often be prevented by good sanitation. If pets are fed outside, remove any uneaten food. Place any garbage in covered, skunk-proof containers and dispose of the garbage frequently. Do not use plastic or paper bags to store garbage. Skunks can easily tear them apart. Clean up wood piles and junk piles and keep grass mowed short. This will discourage skunks from living in these sites and discourage the presence of mice which skunks hunt for food. Block or screen off access under houses, garages, sheds and porches. Use small mesh fence around compost piles.

If skunks still frequent your yard, livetrapping is an effective method for removing them. Skunks are nocturnal so trapping should be done between evening and morning. Set the trap where the skunks have been seen to frequent. Bait the trap with a slice of bread spread with peanut butter. Place the bait behind the trip mechanism. Other baits such as sardines, wet cat food or eggs can be used but bread and peanut butter is less attractive to cats and dogs.

Two types of livetraps are available. One is solid metal trap with a mesh trip-door. The other type is a wire mesh trap. With the solid metal trap there is less chance of being bitten when handling a trapped skunk and the skunk is unlikely to spray while confined in it. If you are using a mesh trap be sure to place a cover, such as a gunny sack or piece of canvas, over the trap before it is set so it can be approached once a skunk is trapped. With mesh traps, extra care must be taken to prevent being bitten or sprayed.

Do not operate the traps during the day unless someone can monitor the trap throughout the day. Do not place the trap where it will be exposed to the sun. Any trapped animal will die from heat stress. Keep dogs and cats confined while trapping to prevent them from being trapped or harassing a trapped skunk.

If the trap has been tripped identify the occupant before handling the trap. If you have trapped a skunk you can either release it or kill it. You should have already made the decision about the fate of the skunk before you begin trapping. If you release it, keep in mind you may be transferring the problem from your residence to someone else's. Also an animal's chance of survival is often reduced when placed in a new, unfamiliar environment where it may die from starvation or competition with resident skunks. If you decide to release the skunk, do not transport it in an enclosed vehicle, it might spray. When releasing the skunk, lock the trap door open, step away and allow the skunk to leave on its own. Do not shake or tip the trap or poke into the trap. You may induce the skunk to spray or bite.

To kill a skunk trapped in a solid metal livetrapp, carefully tip the trap on end. With a hose, quickly fill the trap with water and drown the skunk. To drown a skunk trapped in a mesh trap submerged the entire trap in a large barrel of water. Death will occur within 3-5 minutes. Handle the carcass with gloves and an implement such as shovel. Place the carcass in a plastic bag and dispose of it by burial.

If you are faced with the presence of an adult with young, trapping is usually difficult because you are unlikely to trap the entire family at once. The untrapped animals usually remain near the skunk in the trap and may be difficult and imprudent to approach. In these situations, remove all sources of food from the area. If the skunk family is occupying a porch, foundation or other structure attempt to block access when the entire family is out, usually late evening. If they cannot reenter and there is no food they are likely to move on on their own.

Skunks are a common vector for rabies. Every skunk should be approached and handled with the potential for the presence of rabies in mind. The solid metal trap will prevent being bit. Do not place your fingers around the trap door. Drowning the skunk in the trap rather than releasing it will reduce the risk of possible exposure to rabies.

A healthy skunk will generally ignore or avoid humans. Normal defensive behavior includes arching the tail over the back, stamping of the front feet and directing the anal scent glands at the intruder. A rabid skunk is strictly on the offensive. It may charge head first with the tail down or dragging on the ground. In the later stages of rabies a skunk often drags or has poor control of its hindquarters. If a skunk is suspected of being rabid, contact the local health authorities.

Skunk spray is composed of sulfur compounds mixed in volatile oils. It is penetrating and persistent and no method of odor removal will be completely effective. Home remedies using vinegar, lemon or tomato juice or other mildly acidic solutions will reduce the odor. A variety of commercial products are also available from pet stores, veterinarians or cleaning suppliers. Some products act by degrading the skunk spray while others only mask the odor.

Before returning a trap to storage, be sure it is clean. Rinse the trap with a solution of water and ammonia or water and chlorine bleach to reduce any odor.

Trap Sources:

Mesh traps - Tomahawk Livetrapp Co., Box 323, Tomahawk, WI 54487 715-453-3550
- Woodstream (Havahart), Lititz, PA 17543 717-626-2125

For More Information Contact:

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